

The Kada Panaha Story

Posted on



Fresh vegetables for sale at Kada Panaha

Ever heard of Kada Panaha? Curious as to how this place came about, we inquired after its origins from a pioneer of the fifty shops known as Kada Panaha.

Words Thilini Kahandawaarachchi Photographs Mahesh Prasantha

Situated down Airport Road, Kada Panaha is not only a location, but also a landmark in Anuradhapura. If you know Sinhala it does not require that much imagination to figure out what this place is all about; as the name clearly suggests, it is a collection of fifty odd shops that has been there for as long as anyone can remember. However, when inquired, no one really seemed to know of its beginning; they could only nostalgically recall of a long gone relative who could have been of help.

However, to our luck, someone guided us to a grinding mill amongst the shops, it's owner Gunawardena had been one of the pioneers of Kada Panaha and was more than willing to share with us the story of this place. In the late 1960's when the authorities asked the shop owners engaging in business near the hospital to close the shops and shift, they had had nowhere to go.

When the shops were not shifted, the road had been closed, the buses had stopped coming that way and the long distance buses had started turning near the bo tree in front of where Kada Panaha is today.

Thus, the first fifty coconut leaf thatched huts were erected along what is known as Airport Road today. Among the shops were teashops, provision stores and even a billiard room. Since the buses turned near the bo tree, people used to pick up their provisions from these shops on their way home. As time passed, the coconut thatch huts gave way to shops made of steel sheets. Over the years, some had sold out and moved away while the others had thrived.

Then about two decades ago, Minister K D M C Bandara whom they call Bandara Mahattaya had made provisions to upgrade the steel sheet shops into those made of brick and mortar and assigned the original numbers of the shops to them. Looking back at those days, Gunawardena

says that only a handful of the pioneering members of Kada Panaha remain today. The provisions store that he started long ago has changed into a grinding store. The second generations have taken over some other shops and turned them into thriving businesses. New entrants have joined Kada Panaha, expanding it to more than fifty shops that sell everything from fruits, shoes, curtains, electronic appliances and even contact lenses. Yet, through these changes it has retained the name Kada Panaha and its identity, staking a claim to a past that they look back with pride.

[nggallery id=155]